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ABSTRACT

Sport in general has long had ties with commercial interests, the most popular and widespread involving publicity. Intramural sports programs, however, have not cultivated many commercial involvements in publicity. The approach in intramural sports advertising is simple. A commercial interest pays for space or time in a given communication media (usually printed--newspaper, newsletter, etc.). The business name appears only in the title of the publicity efforts, such as the "McDonald's Intramural Page." The rest of the space is filled with intramural information, pictures, and stories. At the University of Minnesota, Hamms Beer advertised weekly in the student newspaper by sponsoring an intramural page. At Iowa State, participation in intramurals was good, but the student newspaper ran little news about them. McDonald's was convinced to pay for a weekly page covering intramural sports. The publicity was good for the intramural program as well as for McDonald's and convinced the newspaper staff to add intramural news to its regular sports page. The way to sell this concept of advertising is to stress that it is an innovative method along with being soft-sell and that there is solid readership interest in the advertisement from intramural participants. Other possibilities for commercial involvements in intramurals include intramural graduate assistantships or scholarships, scoreboards/time clocks, awards, and intramural rule books or handbooks. (CD)

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COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN INTRAMURALS

A Presentation Submitted at the N.I.S.C.
Sponsored First Central Regional Intramural
Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota

By

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Sport in general has long had ties with commercial interests. The most common commercial involvements in sports occur on the professional and collegiate levels. All of us have seen the collegiate or professional sports game program book full of commercial advertisements. Professional athletics endorse all kinds of products ranging from panty hose to hair spray. Intercollegiate athletics receive commercial support in areas such as courtesy cars, scholarship money, food for the training table, and awards, to mention a few.

The most popular and widespread commercial involvement in sports has been in publicity. The general pattern is that sports programs of almost any type depend on publicity to draw participants and or spectators. Commercial interests have purchased ad space in game programs, on scoreboards, during commercials on radio and t.v. sports coverage, and in newspapers. It is this common need of publicity by both sports programs and commercial interests that has formed a long lasting, cooperative relationship between the two groups. Commercial interests attempt to identify with the American public's deep interest in sport while the sports program sell ad space in all kinds of sports publicity media to offset publicity costs.

Intramural sports programs have not cultivated very many commercial involvements in publicity. Many commercial interests do not know anything about intramural sports, sports clubs, or related programs and think primarily about collegiate, interscholastic, and professional sports ties in which the <u>spectator</u> is the primary target of the publicity effort. In intramurals, however, the <u>participant</u> is the target of the publicity and the approach is <u>advertising by association</u> and is <u>strictly soft-sell</u>. The professional and intercollegiate sports related advertisers put in strictly "selling goods and/or services" type ads in the midst of sports related stories and pictures. We all know from personal experience how much time is spent looking at the ads versus the sports copy!

The approach in intramural sports advertising is very simple. Intramurals has a large constituency (which can be substantiated via participation records) to which I-M program information must be communicated. Many student and local newspapers devote almost all sports copy space to either interscholastic, intercollegiate, or professional sports coverage which leaves intramural programs with no publicity. A commercial interest pays for space or time in a given communication media (usually printed - newspaper, newsletter, etc.). The business name appears only in the title of the publicty efforts, such as the "McDonald's Intramural Page." The rest of the space is filled with I-M information, pictures and stories. Intramural participants then look for the publicity page on a regular basis to get entry deadlines, results, and related stories.

Specific commercial involvements in intramural publicity (not all presently on going) include the following:

1. Hamms Brewing Company - University of Minnesota
2. McDonald's Restaurants
    a. Iowa State University
    b. University of Texas (with Lone Star Beer)
    c. Southern Illinois University
    d. Mankato State College
    e. Winona State University

Most of these commercial involvements in intramurals came about in response to real needs for publicity. At Iowa State University, the student newspaper was virtually not covering intramural sports at all but rather concentrating on intercollegiate athletics. (Fall, 1973) This was quite disappointing as the Iowa State Intramural Program at that time involved 61% of the male and female students on campus but the university community knew little of its scope and student involvement.

Initially, student I-M representatives and I-M staff members made a number of overtures to the student newspaper staff hoping to convince them to cover intramural sports. The student newspaper always had good intentions in mind but never came through with the printed product! After failing in these approaches to the student

newspaper, a different approach to the problem was needed.

My experience in the Intramural Program at the University of Minnesota during my graduate work there introduced me to the concept of involving private commercial business in sponsoring an intramural sports page in the student newspaper. This involvement at Minnesota was with the Theodore Hamms Brewing Company and consisted of the buying of one full page space each week in the student newspaper with Hamms appearing only in the title of the page and with the Hamms Bear Cartoon Mascot. (Hamms had other intramural program involvements besides the page.) The entire page was filled with intramural sports information. The page was also blown up to poster size (26" x 20") for placement in local business establishments and campus buildings. With this background with the Hamms Program at the University of Minnesota, I hoped to find a sponsor for a smiliar page in the Iowa State student newspaper.

The search for a sponsor for such a page in our student newspaper began in an informal intramural staff meeting. A number of possibilities were discussed. We looked for a business that did extensive advertising in the student paper and for some hint of a connection with sports, especially the intramural program. An early suggestion was McDonald's Restaurant as one of the Intramural student staff members knew the owner personally. Along with advertising heavily in the student newspaper, the owner of McDonald's also was an avid jogger and supporter of intramural sports and informal recreational pursuits. It was agreed that McDonald's would be a good potential sponsor of this type of advertising program.

The approach used in the meeting with the McDonald's owner was as an innovative approach to advertising. I took a poster with a blow-up of the Hamms page from Minnesota to the meeting. This was a big help as the potential advertiser had something to look at and could visualize his business in the place of Hamms. Needless to say, McDonald's gladly accepted the proposition. Another big selling point was the tremendous participation we have at Iowa State University. We could

indicate that our constituents (over 12,000) students) would be looking for the page if it appeared on a regular basis.

The details of the McDonald's Intramural Highlites page included the following:

1. Each page cost $100.00 and would appear on a weekly basis throughout each quarter. We attempt to have it on the same day (Wednesday) when it appears. Wednesday was selected as we have entries due on many occasions on this day.

2. The title of the page is McDonald's Intramural Highlites and also includes a McDonald's cartoon character.

3. The page is boxed in and labelled "Advertisement" and "Sponsored by McDonald's."

4. A box appears on each page that explains the page indicating that it is sponsored by McDonald's in conjunction with the Iowa State Intramural Program.

5. The cost of writing articles and providing photographs is supported by the Intramural Program.

6. The Iowa State Daily provides a sports staff writer to put the page together with help from an Intramural student staff member.

7. The McDonald's Page is also blown up to poster size. This is done by a local printer and costs approximately $30 per 100 copies of the page (size 20" x 25"). These posters are put up all over campus and in the community to give another dimension to our publicity.

8. The Intramural Program has total freedom in what appears on the page concerning the intramural program.

9. The "advertising" by McDonald's is "low key" by association only--nowhere will you see "Eat at McDonald's," coupons, etc.

10. Banquets for all members of Intramural championship teams and individual/dual sports champions are held near the end of each quarter with McDonald's serving that world renowned food.

The McDonald's Intramural Highlites page has been very well received by the entire University community. The McDonald's staff and the Iowa State Intramural staff has had many fine comments concerning the involvement in intramural publicity. The publicity has given the Iowa State Intramural Program the exposure it both needs and deserves. This has also spurred interest on the student newspaper staff at Iowa State to reconsider its present coverage of Intramural sports and give us some room on the sports page. They are finally recognizing the scope of the Intramural Program.

In summary, if your intramural program has a problem with publicity you might consider the involvement of local private businesses. If you would want poster-size blow-ups of the Iowa State McDonald's page to aid in your search for a sponsor for a similar involvement, please contact me at Iowa State as we would gladly help in this endeavor. Again, the way to sell this concept of advertising is to stress the following two points: (1) It is an innovative method of advertising along with being soft-sell and (2) you can show solid readership interest in the ad through your intramural participation records.

Other possibilities for commercial involvements in intramurals besides publicity include the following: intramural graduate assistantships or scholarships, score-boards/time clocks, awards, and I-M rule books or I-M Handbooks. This list is certainly not complete - your imagination could very well come up with a number of others. Don't think these things are impossible. Many times the most difficult phase of accepting new ideas is to convince ourselves that something is realistic and attainable. After that, the rest of the process is "downhill."